



*The Little Red
Schoolhouse
Preservation
Committee*

Community Preservation Act Committee
Amherst Town Hall
Amherst, MA

Re: CPA Proposal regarding the Little Red Schoolhouse

June 29, 2015

Dear Community Preservation Act Committee,

The Little Red Schoolhouse Preservation Committee is submitting the attached proposal for CPA funds to move the historic Little Red Schoolhouse which currently stands on the grounds of Amherst College. The Schoolhouse is in the area where the college's new Science Center will be, see this link for more details: <https://www.amherst.edu/aboutamherst/greenway-campus/science-center>. In preparation for the Science Center, Amherst College closed the Little Red Schoolhouse preschool in 2013 and the College now needs to have the building removed or demolished by May or June of 2016 to allow plans for the Science Center to proceed in a timely way.

On May 19, 2015, a public hearing before the Amherst Historical Commission was held on Amherst College's Demolition Application. The Historical Commission granted a one year demolition delay. Since the granting of that delay, members of the Little Red Schoolhouse Preservation Committee have been working on all aspects of the project. Though this project is still in a formative stage, we are filing this proposal as a place holder with the goal of having a more complete project to discuss with the CPAC at its next meeting where proposals will be presented.

Members of the Little Red Schoolhouse Preservation Committee have met with Amherst College to discuss this proposal and the College has developed a list of requirements that they would want satisfied in order for them to be willing to donate the building. These requirements are very reasonable (e.g., the moving of the building would need to occur during a two week window to be determined by the College at the end of the 2015-2016 academic year; there would need to be a location for the building decided by early spring; and other practical factors

to insure the project is done in a serious, responsible manner.) Amherst College is not committing funds at this time toward the move and wanted it to be made clear that the donating of the building should not assume that the College is funding the moving of the building since they are not taking on that responsibility. We will be meeting with the College again in later July to discuss more details, such as the cost estimates for moving the building. We mentioned to the College that if all other pieces of this project come together in a timely and feasible manner, we would like to reopen the discussion about financing and perhaps ask them to consider partnering with the town with some financial support as well.

Based on financial information acquired thus far, we are requesting between \$190,000 and \$250,000 from the CPA Committee, with a more defined amount to be presented at the next meeting CPA meeting discussing such proposals.

Thank you for considering this proposal. We welcome the opportunity to speak to you more about the Little Red Schoolhouse and to answer any questions you may have about this proposal.

Sincerely,

The Little Red Schoolhouse
Preservation Committee

**Community Preservation Act Committee
Proposal Request Form for FY 16**

Proposal from the Little Red Schoolhouse Preservation Committee

Date: June 30, 2015
Submitting Entity: Little Red Schoolhouse Preservation Committee
Contact Person: Carol Gray and Joanna Morse
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Overview of Proposal:

We propose that CPA funds be appropriated to cover the cost of moving the Little Red Schoolhouse building to an appropriate location off the Amherst College campus, perhaps on Town land with a possible affiliation with the school system. (We are still in the process of exploring what sites might be possible for relocation of the building.) This proposal is aimed at preserving the beautiful craftsmanship of the historic building itself; preserving part of the architectural history of our Town since this is one of the few buildings in town designed by the renowned architectural firm McKim, Mead and White; and giving a new use to this building which housed the Little Red Schoolhouse preschool from 1937 to 2013.

It has been said that Amherst is a 'company town' and the business of the company is education. The value of education and the idea of being on the cutting edge in promoting excellence in curriculum at all levels, even in 1937, was at the heart of the founding of the Little Red Schoolhouse.

But the Little Red Schoolhouse is more than a beautiful building, an architectural landmark and a great preschool over many decades; it is also a shining example of how area colleges, in this case Amherst College, can play a positive and meaningful role in the Town of

Amherst, providing a program and a building that has been treasured by more than 1700 children and their families in our community for decades. That the College would contribute to our community in this way over all those years, i.e., by providing the building and an endowment to support an excellent curriculum for our community's children at the most formative stages of their lives, is a real tribute to the College and the partnerships that can unfold between a college and the community of which it is a part. This proposal is to preserve and continue the history of the Little Red School House.

Describe how your request meets the CPA criteria:

1. Description of funding needed including:

a. Documentation of cost estimates

We are seeking between \$190,000 and \$250,000 (with a more defined budget to be presented at a later date) to cover the cost of moving the Little Red Schoolhouse from the grounds of Amherst College to a new location. The Little Red Schoolhouse, designed by esteemed American architectural firm McKim, Mead and White¹ in 1937 (see sketch below), was constructed with funds donated by Amherst College alumnus James Turner who, according to historical records, "insisted that the building should be built of the best materials in the market without regard to any budget."



Referring to the Little Red Schoolhouse in his 1952 publication, *The Consecrated Eminence: The Story of the Campus and Buildings of Amherst College*, former President King wrote, "[n]o building on the Amherst campus is better built."

This solid brick building (see photo below) is more costly to move than wooden structures because of the added weight of the brick. We have had one building moving company come inspect the Little Red Schoolhouse in person to offer a rough estimate. Sylvester's Movers and Excavators, based in East Falmouth, MA, which has been in the business of moving buildings since 1954, visited the building on June 27. They estimated it would cost about \$125,000-\$150,000 to move the building, which they said they would be able to move in one piece. This estimate does not include the cost of building the foundation and any other set-up costs once the building is at the new site. Their rate would include the cost of

¹ Other buildings designed by McKim, Mead and White include Penn Station, the Boston Public Library and the Rhode Island Statehouse.

the digging out of a basement. According to their brochure, “[they] provide full excavation services as an integral part of [their] business from moving or raising a structure. All of [their] operators are experts in excavating... to make ...ready for [the] foundation, safely and efficiently.” (See brochure attached.)

The procedure for moving a house was explained in some detail by Stan Wildes the owner of Granite State Building Movers (website: <http://granitestatebuildingmovers.com/>) who I spoke with several years ago when we first considered this project. Mr. Wildes has personally been in the business of moving buildings for more than forty years. His business, Granite State Building Movers, formerly owned by his father and grandfather, has moved 3,000-4,000 buildings since they were established in 1945. He is also very familiar with moving brick buildings and has moved them before without problems, though the process with brick buildings takes longer and is more costly. With a single story building such as the Little Red Schoolhouse with a square footage of approximately 1800 square feet, Mr. Wildes estimated in 2011 that the cost could be in the \$100,000 range to move the building to a location in town two miles or less away.²

According to Mr. Wildes, the reason brick buildings are more costly to move is because they require stronger steel and more of it than a wooden structure to support the building in the move. The process is this:

- First, you ‘open up the pockets’ of the foundation all the way around. (This involves digging down around the building then cutting holes in the foundation walls)
- Install a cradle of steel in both directions all the way around. The distance between the steel beams cannot exceed four feet because of the weight of the brick. The brick has to be supported everywhere.
- Come in with unified jacking equipment that will raise the building all at the same time.
- Roll it off the foundation and load it on to floatation dollies to keep the building level at all times.
- Move it down the road to the new lot.
- When moving it, utility wires would either be raised or lowered by the utility companies. If they are lowered, the moving company puts planks across the wires to drive over them.
- The building could be on the road for as long as a couple days, which would mean that roads might be closed temporarily by police escorts.
- When the new location is reached, the building is rolled over to the new foundation. The building is supported over the foundation while brickwork is done to join the foundation to the bottom of the building. After the brickwork sets, the equipment that was suspending the building is taken away.

The cost of the move depends on how many days or weeks the entire process takes.

b. Other sources of funding, e.g., grants, self-funding, fund-raising

If CPA were willing to recommend funding, this would be used to try to leverage other sources of funding. Amherst College would be making a significant in-kind donation of the

² To be on the safe side, this proposal factors in the higher amount for the physical moving of the building; if the cost were in fact lower, the balance would be returned.

building which is valuable. According to one architect who examined the building, the roof alone would cost approximately \$100,000 to build if constructed today. We would also seek grants, other in-kind support (such as a local architect who may be willing to offer his expertise on a voluntary basis to assist with the move), and other sources.

Regarding the new location for the schoolhouse, we hope it might be possible to relocate the building to some property owned by the school system, with the hope that it might reopen at some point as a preschool again. We are also exploring whether either of the other two local colleges might be interested in having the schoolhouse on their grounds.

While we recognize that there are still numerous pieces that would need to fall into place to make this project come to fruition, we think this process is precisely what is contemplated by the CPA. Leveraging funds implies other funds and resources are not yet committed, as is the case with this project. In our discussions with all these parties, it would be enormously helpful to have Community Preservation Act funds available to cover the cost of the moving of the building and preparing the new site for the building.

c. Timeline on how CPA funds, if awarded, would be spent

The timeline for this project would be evolving in the months to come with the goal of having a proposal ready for the fall CPA funding cycle. Amherst College is actively working with us to try to expedite this process. Since the building would need to be moved in May and/or June of 2016, this project is urgent. It is also a project that will definitely be completed in a timely way since the schedule for the building of the College's new Science Center is on a strict time-table.

d. Timeline for spending funds; expectation for spending over multiple years

The moving of the building would be completed by July 2015. The building of the foundation and any necessary updates to the building to make it up to code (if that is required by law) and to connect it to the Town's water and sewer system would happen in the months that followed. At most, this project would span two fiscal years.

2. Urgency of the Project

Since the Amherst Historical Commission has issued a one year demolition delay on May 19, 2015 that will expire in May 2016 and since the collaboration with Amherst College depends on the moving of the building being done in May or June of 2016, this project could not be more urgent. .

3. Estimated timeline from receipt of funds to project completion:

The goal would be to have CPA funds approved at the Fall Town Meeting which would allow the moving of the building to occur on the time table that Amherst College requires to match the time table for the building of the College's new Science Center.

4. Acquisition or preservation of threatened resources:

The Little Red Schoolhouse is literally one of a kind. It is critical to preserve for many reasons³:

- 1) The architectural firm that designed it, McKim, Mead and White, is prominent and nationally recognized having also designed Penn Station, the Boston Public Library and the Rhode Island State House, as well as Amherst's own Mead Art Building and the Amherst College War Memorial overlooking Memorial Field.
- 2) It is an extremely well-constructed building, made with the best materials of its time period. Former Amherst College President Stanley King wrote, "No building on the Amherst campus is better built."
- 3) The interior of the building has exquisite and unique woodwork that is still in pristine condition.



³ We are including with this proposal an electronic version of the booklet our committee compiled entitled *Amherst's Little Red Schoolhouse, A Historic Treasure*.

The brick exterior is also still in excellent condition, as can be seen in the photo below:



- 4) The Little Red Schoolhouse was designed in 1937 to be the first permanent preschool of Amherst, and for the past 75 years until 2013, it was continuously a preschool. This is important to Amherst's history not just as a historic building, but also as a part of the history of education in our town and the evolving understanding about the importance of quality preschool education.

In 1951, former Amherst College President Stanley King wrote in a document entitled *The Consecrated Eminence* that "[t]he school has now been in operation in its new building for some fourteen years and continues to serve a real need of college and community with striking success." That the building continued to successfully serve its original purpose for more than 75 years is a remarkable achievement.

- 5) The building is unique in that everything in it is designed for preschoolers:
- Built-in wooden cubbies in the hallway for children to hang their coats in with a shelf under and above each coat space for their boots, books and other belongings
 - The window seats around the periphery of the large meeting room are all child-sized.
 - The windows are at a low level so that children can see out
 - The bathroom is fitted with children's toilets and children's sized sinks.



The linkage between the success of the Little Red Schoolhouse program and the well-suited architecture of the building is one of the most valuable parts of the historical worth of the building.

5. Population Served:

While the Little Red Schoolhouse was originally proposed by Amherst College faculty wives by means of a petition to then Amherst College President Stanley King, the overwhelming majority of students who have graduated from the program have been from the community. This was the case even in the early years of the school's existence. A newspaper article from the Gazette in 1943 entitled "*5th Anniversary of Day School Is Being Celebrated*", stated:

Although the school was started by a group of Amherst college mothers interested in sound preschool training, it has never been limited to college children and it is interesting to note that for the past two years the number drawn from the town has predominated.

The Little Red Schoolhouse used to serve a diverse group of approximately 20 students per year aged 3.6 to 5 years old. Two to five of students each year were minorities. Two to five students each year were children of parents in one of the area's graduate programs. Partial tuition waivers were offered every year for low-income students. Overall, the School was able to keep its fees affordable while also promoting excellence in education, programs in music and art, and collaborative learning that teaches conflict resolution and independence at a very early age. It is our hope that the Little Red Schoolhouse could reopen one day on grounds owned by the school system or some other entity that could use the building for its original purpose and still incorporate these same values supporting racial, ethnic and economic diversity while offering needed preschool positions for children in our community.

In addition to serving children, the Little Red Schoolhouse had also functioned as an intern program of sorts for Amherst College with nine to ten Amherst College student volunteers working in the school every semester, often receiving payment through their work-study packages.

The Little Red School House, both the building and the program, is a great asset for our community and has been for more than three quarters of a century.

Photo at Little Red Schoolhouse (1968)



6. How the Project is prioritized by requesting Town committees or commissions

Since we are still at the beginning stages of this project, we have not yet discussed the current funding application with the Historical Commission but will be reaching out to them as more details come together. Our Preservation Committee did meet with the Historical Commission several years ago about this same project idea and that Commission wrote a letter supporting the preservation of the building (see letter attached).

7. Information regarding the project deemed necessary for CPAC

The idea of moving a historic house with CPA funds is not new. In Norwell, Massachusetts several years ago, Town Meeting sought funds to move a historic house called the Stetson House. There, the house was to be moved to Town land as a temporary location until a permanent site is decided upon.⁴ In Hopkinton, Massachusetts, two houses were moved to Town-owned land with CPA funds in order to provide affordable housing.⁵

We welcome any additional questions the Community Preservation Act Committee may have about this project.

⁴ Craig Salters, "Plans Moving Forward on Stetson House", *Wicked Local Norwell*, October 20, 2011, visited on December 9, 2011 at <http://www.wickedlocal.com/norwell/features/x485800433/Plans-moving-forward-on-Stetson-House#axzz1g0lxBU8G>

⁵ See chart found at this link: http://www.ci.wellesley.ma.us/pages/WellesleyMA_CPC/otherprojects.pdf